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To: Burger, David
Subject: RE: Da0601-7-eng

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/diplomatic and international mission service/

World/Macedonia**BND admits it knew about El-Masri's arrest in Macedonia**

Berlin, 01.06.2006 (Makfax) - Germany's foreign spy agency BND admitted on Thursday that one of its staff knew, but failed to report, that the German citizen Khaled el-Masri had been arrested abroad and handed to CIA.

A BND's spokesperson said the employee was told in Macedonia in January 2004 about the arrest.

The BND said its employee had heard about Masri during a conversation in the canteen of a Macedonian security agency in the first half of January 2004.

"A person he did not know casually told him that a German citizen called el-Masri had been arrested at Skopje airport because he was on a wanted list. El-Masri had been handed over to the Americans," the agency said in a statement

A spokesman said the man was a low-ranking official who had not realized the significance of the information. "We are clearly in a rather embarrassing situation now... It is highly regrettable but it can't be changed," he said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel's office said in a statement it "regretted" the information had not previously come to light and would pass it on to Munich prosecutors who are investigating his alleged abduction, Reuters agency reported.

The admission puts BND and the German Government in a troublesome position, since both claimed that they learned about El-Masri case much later on in 2004.

The intelligence agency is also reeling from disclosures in an investigator's report last week that it spied on German journalists until a few months ago to try and discover their sources.

The case of Khaled el-Masri shadows awkwardly the Macedonian Government and Police also.

Both institutions have repeatedly claimed that El-Masri was never arrested, but had only transited Macedonia legally.

PM Vlado Buckovski stated this before the European Parliament (EP) few months ago, while the Interior Minister Ljubomir Mihajlovski gave similar statement before the Macedonian Parliament. He reiterated this position before Temporary Committee of the European Parliament probing into el-Masri case,

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within the investigation on the alleged involvement of EU country-members or candidates in secret arrests of terrorist suspects, requested by CIA.

Region

Bulgarian authorities seize cigarettes of Macedonian origin

Sofia, 01.06.2006 (Makfax) - Bulgarian authorities seized in two separate actions a large quantity of cigarettes without revenue stamps, some of them originating from Macedonia, Bulgarian Police announced.

106.000 pieces of cigarettes and 80 bottles of liquor bottles were confiscated at a marketplace in Sofia, after conducted inspection.

Half of the cigarettes were of Macedonian and Serbian origin, while the other half were fake Marlboros.

In a different case, inspectors seized 270.000 pieces of cigarettes of unknown origin in a terracotta shop.

The price of these cigarettes that were sold at the Bulgarian marketplaces was lower than the one of the cheapest Bulgarian cigarettes without filter.

The excise duty evasion for the total of 306.000 pieces of cigarettes is estimated to 42.000 leva (21.000 euros).

Macedonia/Greece

Sekerinska and Stylianidis on completion of highway

Athens, 01.06.2006 (Makfax) - The completion of the Pan-European Corridor 10, more precisely the construction of highway roads at the sections on Macedonian territory, was the central topic of the Greek-Macedonian talks that took place in Athens today.

Macedonian Vice-Prime Minister Radmila Sekerinska and Greek Deputy Foreign Minister Evripidis Stylianidis have agreed to set up a technical-level meeting in late July, at which concrete activities for launching construction works are to be defined.

The highway road with total length of 33 kilometers is due to be constructed at Demir Kapija-Udovo-Smokvica section, Sekerinska's Cabinet announced.

The interlocutors discussed also projects that are included in the Greek plan for economic reconstruction of the Balkans, referring to Macedonia.

The highlights of Sekerinska-Stylianidis talks included also the bilateral cooperation in the fields spanning investment operations, infrastructure, as well as the cross-border cooperation.

Launching of a project worth 5,5 million euros for building a purification station in Gevgelija has been announced at the meeting.